(d) whether import of crude is also increasing and if so, the arrangement made for providing more tankers and efforts made to reduce the freight rates?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Freight rates for various categories of tankers in September, 04 and at present (December, 04) are as under:—

	SEPTEMBER, 04	DECEMBER, 04
Very Large Crude Carrier (about 275,000 M tons)		
From West Africa:	US$10-11.00 per ton	US$ 30-31.00 per ton
From Arabian Gulf:	US$4.50-5.00 per ton	US$ 14.50-15.00 ; per ton
SUEZ MAX (Arabian Gulf) (about 135,000 M tons)	US$ 6.50-7.00 per to	US$ 16.00-16.50 per ton
AFRAMAX (Arabian Gulf) (about 90,000 M tons)	US$7.50-8.00 per ton	US$14.50-15.00 per ton

(c) Yes, Sir. Main reasons for increase in charter rates are seasonal increase in demand during winter in Europe, USA and also increased demand from China.

(d) There is an increase in import of crude oil. In order to increase the number of Indian Tankers, Government has taken various fiscal measures which include introduction of tonnage tax, 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment in Shipping Sector, enhancement of depreciation rate from 20 per cent to 25 per cent for ships etc. However, freight rates depend on demand and supply of tankers available in the required position.

Establishment of passport office in Shimla

†747. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the names of States where passport offices have not been established till date;

(b) whether it is a fact that a decision to establish a passport office in

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

the capital of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla was taken and a building was also hired for the said purpose;

(c) if so, the details thereof and by when a passport office would be established therein; and

(d) if not, the reasons for not establishing a passport office in States' headquarter itself to relieve the people of the State from the problems being faced by them due to frequent visits of Chandigarh for passport related affairs?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Passport Offices have not been opened in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttaranchal.

(b) There is a decision to open a Passport Office in Shimala where a Passport Application Collection Centre (PACC) is already located. A building to house the proposed passport office was shortlisted but was never hired.

(c) and (d) Due to human resource and other constraints, at present the Government is not in a position to open more Passport Offices, including at Shimla. However, with a view to taking the passport services closer to the public, a Decentralisation Scheme has been introduced under which the applicants can submit the passport applications at the district level in the District Passport Cells (DPCs) set up in the office of District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police, and thus do not have to travel long distances for that purpose. The DPCs are already functional in 25 States, including Himachal Pradesh.

Issuance of Passport with a Seal "Except Pakistan"

†748. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that direction have been issued to the regional Passport Office of Jammu-Kashmir that while giving passport to the Kashmiri youths seal of "Except Pakistan' should be put on it";

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.